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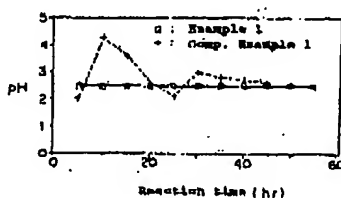
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DE FR GB(71) Applicant: **DAIKIN INDUSTRIES, LIMITED**
Umeda Center Building,
4-12 Nakazaki-nishi 2-chome,
Kita-ku
Osaka-shi, Osaka-fu 530(JP)

Inventor: **HONDA, Hiroyuki**, Yodogawa Works
of
Dai-kin Industries Ltd.,
1-1, Nishihitotsuya
Settsu-shi, Osaka 566(JP)
Inventor: **OKUNO, Chuzou**, Yodogawa Works
of
Dai-kin Industries Ltd.,
1-1, Nishihitotsuya
Settsu-shi, Osaka 566(JP)

(72) Inventor: **NODA, Tomohisa**, Yodogawa Works
of Dai-kin Ind. Ltd
1-1, Nishihitotsuya
Settsu-shi, Osaka 566(JP)(74) Representative: **Hansen, Bernd, Dr.**
Dipl.-Chem. et al.
Hoffmann, Eitle & Partner,
Patentanwälte,
Arabellastrasse 4
D-81925 München (DE)(54) **PROCESS FOR PRODUCING TETRAFLUOROETHYLENE/HEXAFLUOROPROPYLENE COPOLYMER.**

(57) A process for producing a tetrafluoroethylene/hexafluoropropylene copolymer by copolymerizing tetrafluoroethylene with hexafluoropropylene in an aqueous medium using di(fluoroacyl) peroxide as the polymerization initiator, wherein a fluoroalkylcarboxylic acid is fed to the reaction system. The obtained copolymer has a stabilized molecular weight and the polymerization initiator can be utilized more efficiently.

Fig. 1



Rank Xerox (UK) Business Services

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a method for preparing a tetrafluoroethylene/hexafluoropropylene copolymer.

RELATED ART

In the preparation of a tetrafluoroethylene/hexafluoropropylene copolymer, usually an alkali, for example, sodium bicarbonate (NaHCO_3) is added to an aqueous medium before the initiation of the polymerization in order to prevent the corrosion of a polymerization reactor so that an aqueous alkaline solution is formed, and then a large amount of a diperoxide initiator is added to conduct the polymerization. The reason why the alkali is added is that an acidic material such as hydrofluoric acid is prepared by the decomposition of the monomer during the polymerization so that the acidic material may corrode the polymerization reactor.

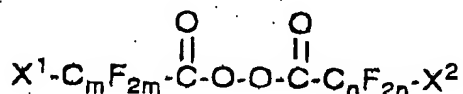
However, since the polymerization initiator tends to be easily hydrolyzed in the aqueous alkaline solution at the beginning of the polymerization, the polymerization initiator cannot be effectively utilized.

In addition, pH of the aqueous medium varies widely so that the hydrolysis conversion is unstable. Accordingly, the initiator efficiency is not constant and a resultant copolymer has an unstable molecular weight.

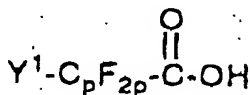
SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An object of the present invention is to stabilize the molecular weight of the tetrafluoroethylene/hexafluoropropylene copolymer prepared by the polymerization in the aqueous medium using the di(fluoroacyl) peroxide polymerization initiator so that the utilization efficiency of the polymerization initiator is increased.

The present invention provides a method for preparing a tetrafluoroethylene/hexafluoropropylene copolymer by polymerizing tetrafluoroethylene and hexafluoropropylene in an aqueous medium using, as a polymerization initiator, a di(fluoroacyl) peroxide of the formula:



wherein X^1 and X^2 each is a hydrogen, fluorine or chlorine atom, m is an integer of 4 to 8 when X^1 is the hydrogen atom, and m is an integer of 3 to 8 when X^1 is the fluorine or chlorine atom, and n is an integer of 4 to 8 when X^2 is the hydrogen atom, and n is an integer of 3 to 8 when X^2 is the fluorine or chlorine atom, characterized in that a fluoroalkylcarboxylic acid of the formula:



wherein Y^1 is a hydrogen, fluorine or chlorine atom, and p is an integer of 4 to 8 when Y^1 is the hydrogen atom, and p is an integer of 3 to 8 when Y^1 is the fluorine or chlorine atom, is added to a polymerization system before the initiation of the polymerization or during the polymerization.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a graph showing a relationship between a reaction time and pH during the copolymerization of tetrafluoroethylene and hexafluoropropylene.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The $Y^1-C_pF_{2p}$ - group in the fluoroalkylcarboxylic acid may be linear or branch d. Specific examples of the fluoroalkylcarboxylic acid are ω -hydroperfluoroheptanoic acid, ω -hydroperfluorononanoic acid, ω -hydroperfluoroheptanoic acid, ω -hydroperfluoropentanoic acid, perfluoropropionic acid, perfluorobutanoic acid, perfluoropentanoic acid, perfluorohexanoic acid, perfluoroheptanoic acid, perfluorooctanoic acid, perfluorononanoic acid and the like. Preferably, the amount of the used fluoroalkylcarboxylic acid is from 0.05 to 0.5 parts by weight per 100 parts by weight of water in the polymerization system.

The $X^1-C_mF_{2m}$ - group and the $X^2-C_nF_{2n}$ group in the di(fluoroacyl) peroxide used as the polymerization initiator may be linear or branched and may be the same or different. Specific examples of the di(fluoroacyl) peroxide are di(ω -hydro-dodecafluoroheptanoyl) peroxide, di(hydro-tetradecafluorooctanoyl) peroxide, di(ω -hydro-hexadecafluorononanoic acid, perfluoropropionic acid, perfluorobutanoic acid, perfluoropentanoic acid, perfluorohexanoic acid, perfluoroheptanoic acid, perfluorooctanoic acid, perfluorononanoic acid and the like. Preferably, the amount of the used fluoroalkylcarboxylic acid is from 0.05 to 0.5 parts by weight per 100 parts by weight of water in the polymerization system.

In the present invention, the amount of the used polymerization initiator is suitably determined according to the molecular weight of the copolymer and the contents of tetrafluoroethylene (referred to as "TFE" hereinafter) and hexafluoropropylene (referred to as "HFP" hereinafter) in the copolymer. Usually it is from about 0.01 to about 1 parts by weight per 100 parts by weight of the monomer. Since the polymerization initiator has a relatively high decomposition rate and the concentration of the polymerization initiator tends to decrease considerably during the polymerization reaction, if necessary, the polymerization initiator is suitably added to the polymerization system during the polymerization reaction.

Preferably, the $Y^1-C_pF_{2p}$ - group in the fluoroalkylcarboxylic acid is the same as one, preferably both, of the $X^1-C_mF_{2m}$ - group and the $X^2-C_nF_{2n}$ - group in the di(fluoroacyl) peroxide.

The polymerization reaction is initiated by charging pure water and the fluoroalkylcarboxylic acid in a pressure vessel, adding TFE and HFP and then adding the polymerization initiator. The ratio by volume of water to the monomer is preferably from about 1:1 to about 10:1, particularly about 2:1 to about 5:1. The content of TFE in the TFE/HFP monomer mixture is determined according to the composition of the objective copolymer. There is the following relationship at about 20-25 °C:

The content of TFE in the monomer mixture (%)	The content of TFE in the copolymer (%)
5	78
10	87
20	82

Water is used as the reaction medium. If necessary, a solvent in which TFE and HFP dissolve may be added in a suitable amount. Preferably, specific examples of such solvent are fluorine - containing solvents such as trichlorotrifluoroethane, monofluorotrichloromethane and the like. If necessary, any of an emulsion stabilizing agent such as polyvinyl alcohol and sodium carboxymethylcellulose, sodium bicarbonate and borax may be added.

A polymerization temperature is restricted mainly by the decomposition rate of the polymerization initiator. The decomposition reaction of the polymerization initiator in the presence of water proceeds as a first-order reaction and a rate constant (k) of the reaction is, for example, as follows:

	5 °C	23 °C
$(HC_6F_{12}CO)_2O_2$	0.031 hr ⁻¹	0.19 hr ⁻¹
$(C_3F_7CO)_2O_2$	0.043 hr ⁻¹	0.14 hr ⁻¹

At a temperature of at least 35 °C, a half-life period of the polymerization initiator is about one hour and the concentration of the polymerization initiator remarkably changes so that such temperature is unsuitable for the uniform polymerization reaction. The polymerization temperature is usually selected from a temperature range between 0 and 35 °C, particularly between 0 and 28 °C. The pressure at the polymerization

tion reaction is determined according to the content ratio of TFE to HFP in the mixture monomer, the presence/absence of the solvent, and the polymerization temperature. Generally, when the solvent is not used, the reaction pressure is suitably from about 5 to about 15 kg/cm² (an indicated pressure of a gauge, the same hereinafter). When trichlorotrifluoroethane and the like are used as the solvent, the reaction pressure varies according to the ratio of the solvent to the monomer and is suitably from about 0.5 to about 15 kg/cm².

As the reaction proceeds, the pressure in the polymerization system is decreased. In order to compensate the decrease of the pressure, only TFE may be added so as to continue the reaction. Alternatively, both of TFE and HFP may be added in the amounts corresponding to the amounts of the consumed monomers. The polymerization time depends on the yield of the objective copolymer as well as the amount of the used polymerization initiator, the ratio of TFE to HFP and the polymerization temperature. The polymerization time is usually selected from the time range between 2 hours and 100 hours. The presence of oxygen during the polymerization reaction is not preferable.

When the yield of the copolymer reaches the desired value, a crude TFE/HFP copolymer is obtained in the form of from fine particles to granules by recovering the monomer.

The TFE/HFP copolymer obtained by the method of the present invention has many advantages such as the advantage that it has an unchanged molten viscosity, is stable and has no black discoloration in the step of the melt extrusion or in the step of thermally shaping the pelletized material after the extrusion (In addition, the method of the present invention is commercially remarkably more advantageous than the reactions in the solvent, since the former is the reaction in water). The method of the present invention can be advantageously used for the molded material and the like.

PREFERRED EMBODIMENT OF THE INVENTION

The present invention will be illustrated by the following Examples.

Example 1

In a jacketed glass-lined autoclave having a stirrer which can receive 7,500 parts by weight of water, demineralized deaerated pure water (2,000 parts by weight) and ω -hydroperfluoroheptanoic acid (a fluoroalkylcarboxylic acid) (1.0 parts by weight) were charged. The atmosphere in the autoclave was fully replaced with a pure nitrogen gas, and the nitrogen gas was removed. HFP (2,000 parts by weight) was injected in the autoclave and then TFE was injected so that the internal pressure in the autoclave was 8.3 kg/cm²G. The temperature was adjusted at 25.5 °C and the stirring was initiated. Di(ω -hydrododecafluoroheptanoyl) peroxide was added as a polymerization initiator and methanol was added as a molecular weight controlling agent. The reaction was initiated immediately. During the reaction, TFE was gradually added according to the decrease of the pressure so as to maintain the constant pressure. After the reaction was conducted for 56.8 hours, the monomer was purged. A resultant polymer was separated, washed and dried to give a granular polymer.

The conditions of the polymerization reaction, and the yield and properties of the polymer are shown in Table 1. A specific melt viscosity of the polymer was measured as follows:

The specific melt viscosity means an apparent melt viscosity which is measured at 372 °C under a shear strength of 0.475 kg/cm². Namely, this value is measured by a melt indexer. The polymer is filled in a cylinder having an internal diameter of 11.4 mm and kept at 372 °C for 5 minutes. The polymer is extruded through an orifice having an internal diameter of 2.0 mm and a length of 8 mm under a piston load of 5 kg. The specific melt viscosity is calculated on the basis of the extrusion speed (MI (g/10 min.)) according to the following equation:

$$\text{Specific melt viscosity} = 10^{(1.818 - \log(MI)/0.980 + 4)} \text{ [poise]}$$

Comparative Example 1

The copolymerization of TFE and HFP was conducted in the same manner as in Example 1, except that the amounts of the used raw materials and the reaction conditions are shown in Table 1. The yield and properties of the resultant polymer are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

		Comp. Ex. 1	Example 1
Amounts of raw materials	Amount of used water [parts by weight]	2,000	2,000
	Amount of charged HFP [parts by weight]	2,000	2,000
	Pressure of charged TFE [kg/cm ² G]	8.30	8.30
	Fluoroalkylcarboxylic acid [parts by weight]	0	1.0
	NaHCO ₃ [parts by weight]	1.25	0
	Amount of charged methanol [parts by weight]	First time 13.4	First time 11.7
		Second time 13.4	Second time 11.7
		Third time 13.4	Third time 11.7
		Fourth time 13.4	Fourth time 11.7
	Amount of charged polymerization Initiator [parts by weight]	First time 2.85	First time 2.0
		Second time 2.85	Second time 2.0
		Third time 1.13	Third time 1.13
		Addition 0.19	Addition 0.19
Condit- ions	Temperature [°C]	25.5	25.5
	Reaction time [hr]	58.0	56.8
Polymer	Yield [parts by weight]	2,500	2,500
	Specific melt viscosity [poise]	6.5×10^4	6.7×10^4
	Melting point [°C]	269	266

The pH change during the copolymerization is shown in Fig. 1. In the Comparative Example, the pH remarkably changes at the beginning of the copolymerization. But, in the Example, the pH is stable.

The results of a metal content of a shaped article after the heat melting are shown in Table 2. Table 2 shows that the metal content is low in Example 1.

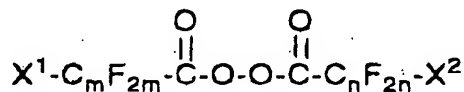
Table 2

	Comp. Ex. 1	Example 1
Iron Ion	23	4
Nickel Ion	0	2
Sodium Ion	640	67
Unit: ppb		

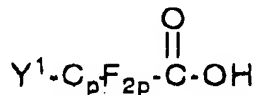
Since, according to the method of the present invention, the hydrolysis of the initiator at the beginning of the polymerization is prevented and the initiator is effectively used, the amount of the initiator at the beginning of the polymerization can be decreased by at least 30 %. The total amount of the catalyst can be decreased by, for example, at least 20 or 30%. The pH is constant from the beginning to the end of the polymerization so that the copolymer having a constant molecular weight can be prepared with high reproductivity. Since the polymerization vessel is less corroded during the polymerization, the metal content of the polymer is low. In addition, the polymer has low discoloration after the heat melting.

Claims

1. A method for preparing a tetrafluoroethylene/hexafluoro propylene copolymer by polymerizing tetrafluoroethylene and hexafluoropropylene in an aqueous medium using, as a polymerization initiator, a di(fluoroacyl) peroxide of the formula:



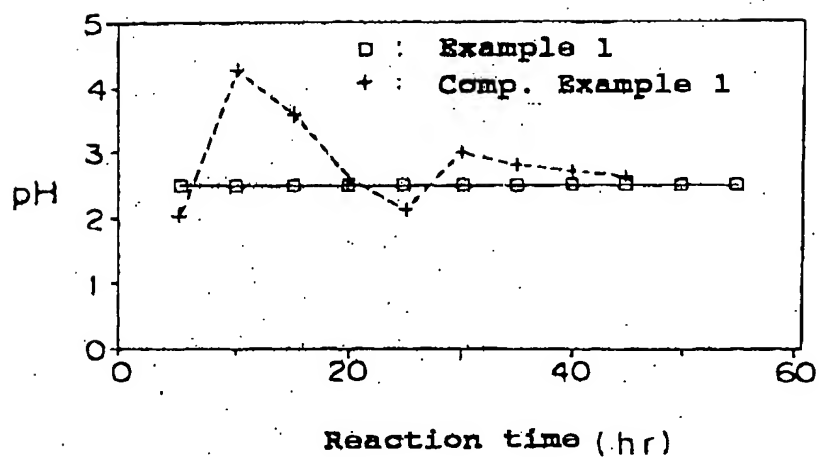
wherein X^1 and X^2 each is a hydrogen, fluorine or chlorine atom, m is an integer of 4 to 8 when X^1 is the hydrogen atom, and m is an integer of 3 to 8 when X^1 is the fluorine or chlorine atom, and n is an integer of 4 to 8 when X^2 is the hydrogen atom, and n is an integer of 3 to 8 when X^2 is the fluorine or chlorine atom, characterized in that a fluoroalkylcarboxylic acid of the formula:



wherein Y^1 is a hydrogen, fluorine or chlorine atom, and p is an integer of 4 to 8 when Y^1 is the hydrogen atom, and p is an integer of 3 to 8 when Y^1 is the fluorine or chlorine atom, is added to a polymerization system before the initiation of the polymerization or during the polymerization.

2. The method according to claim 1, wherein the amount of the fluoroalkylcarboxylic acid is from 0.01 to 1.0 parts by weight per 100 parts by weight of water.

Fig. 1



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/JP93/00949

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

Int. Cl.⁵ C08F214/26, C08F214/28, C08F4/34, C08F2/16

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

Int. Cl.⁵ C08F2/00-2/60, C08L27/00-27/24, C08F214/18-214/28,
C08F14/18-14/28, C08F114/18-114/28, C08F4/00-4/82

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Jitsuyo Shinan Koho 1926 - 1993
Kokai Jitsuyo Shinan Koho 1971 - 1993

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

WPI/L

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	JP, B2, 59-28211 (Daikin Industries, Ltd.), July 11, 1984 (11. 07. 84), Claim (Family: none)	1-2
A	JP, B2, 57-40847 (Daikin Industries, Ltd.), August 31, 1982 (31. 08. 82), Claim (Family: none)	1-2

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.☐ See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

"E" earlier document but published on or after the international filing date
"L" document which may throw doubt on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"T" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

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"Z" document member of the same patent family

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